

For Immediate Release

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Provincial Budget Misses the Mark for Women's Equality

While Tuesday's provincial budget brought an array of positive spending initiatives, a lot more needs to be done to advance women's equality, say council members of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

"This budget was wide but not very deep in addressing inequalities," says Advisory Council president, Leslie MacLeod. "We're pleased with many of the announcements but we also wanted to see improvements to child-care and early learning programs, the home support program, income support programs and more affordable housing."

In yesterday's budget, the province announced the new Family Growth Policy, which involves giving \$1000 to every birth and adoptive mother, plus \$100 per month for a year to all mothers. While MacLeod is pleased with these supports, she says more needs to be done for families.

"Child care is a serious issue for women in our province," says MacLeod. "We were hoping to see something in the budget to address how hard it is for women to access affordable child-care and early learning programs."

According to the Child Care Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador, this province has roughly 49,000 mothers with children under the age of 12. But only 4,400 regulated child-care spaces.

"Not only are there too few spaces, costs are often prohibitive," says MacLeod. "For women to have the same opportunities as men, they must be able to afford child care and more spaces must be made available."

The province also announced increases in rent supplements and supportive housing but members of the Advisory Council hoped for more.

"The lack of affordable housing is reaching crisis proportions," says MacLeod. "Prices are skyrocketing, leaving women and children with no place to live."

According to MacLeod, industry growth in rural areas continues to impact women and children negatively. "We're hearing from women's centres that women and children are turning up on their doorsteps with no where to go," says MacLeod. "We need a comprehensive, affordable housing strategy to deal with this problem."

Poverty is another issue members of the Advisory Council were hoping would see more attention in the 2008 provincial budget.

"Women continue to account for the majority of the poor in our province and a lot more needs to be done to address this inequity," says MacLeod. "For example, home support workers and consumers still live in poverty despite the province's wealth. We wanted to see increases to income support and a firm schedule for increases to minimum wage."

Hilda Whelan, council member from Whitbourne, agrees poverty reduction needs to be a higher priority for the provincial government.

“I cannot believe that a government with such a surplus has not increased the fuel allocation for people receiving income support,” says Whelan. “They currently receive \$25 per month which won’t pay the taxes on \$100 worth of oil which doesn’t warm a home for a week. The annual oil rebate only pays for a few weeks of heat.”

Members of the Advisory Council say they will continue to push for changes that will improve women’s lives.

“For the first time in history, Newfoundland and Labrador has the means to do better,” says MacLeod. “The province’s social and economic policies must work together to advance women’s equality.”

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